



Survivor Outreach Services

Fort Stewart/Hunter Army Airfield

Volume 1, Issue 3

Winter 2012

The Link



Photo of the Gold Star Mother's Day Butterfly Release on September 25, 2011

Inside this Issue:

Letters to Gold Star Families	2-3
Ft. Stewart SOS Team Member bios	4
SOS Decal/license plates	5
GAT Information/Financial Corner	6-7
Circle of Friends Information	8
Upcoming Events	9
Contact Information	10

Dear Army Family,

We hope you are doing well and are having a wonderful year! There have been some exciting changes in our SOS program and we hope this newsletter will provide you with some great information about different programs that are available to you as a member of the Army Family.

We look forward to assisting and seeing everyone very soon. Best wishes today, tomorrow and always.

Sincerely,

Your Fort Stewart/Hunter Army Airfield SOS Family

Survivor Outreach Services
1145 Niles Avenue, Bldg. 4973
Fort Stewart, GA 31314
(912) 435-9633/9761
stewartsos@conus.army.mil
www.stewart.army.mil
Join us on Facebook!

The Link is a quarterly newsletter produced by the Survivor Outreach Services office at Fort Stewart/Hunter Army Airfield, GA. Any questions or comments about content should be directed to the SOS staff. If your family would like to share information via this newsletter, please send it to us. We also urge Families to supply updated contact information, so that SOS can keep you connected to your Army Family.

Letter to Gold Star Families from General Raymond Odierno



**UNITED STATES ARMY
THE CHIEF OF STAFF**

December 20, 2011

Army Gold Star Families,

As we pause to observe the end of Operation Iraqi Freedom/New Dawn, I want to extend my deepest gratitude to those who have borne the enormous burden of sacrifice on behalf of our Nation.

The Secretary of the Army, Sergeant Major of the Army and I have sent the attached letter to the force. I feel compelled, however, to address our Gold Star community personally.

No one knows the acute cost of war better than our Gold Star Families and as we close this chapter of our history, our Gold Star Families will always be honored and remembered by a grateful Nation.

I know that words will never fully express the sense of loss that you feel, but I assure you that our Army and our Nation will never forget those that bravely gave their last full measure in defense of our freedom.

I humbly thank all of you on behalf of the Soldiers, Civilians and Families of the United States Army.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Odierno".

Raymond T. Odierno
General, United States Army



Operation Iraqi Freedom/New Dawn

They [Soldiers] will cross the border out of Iraq with their heads held high. One of the most extraordinary chapters in the history of the American military will come to an end. Iraq's future will be in the hands of its people. America's war in Iraq will be over.

President Obama, 14 December 2011

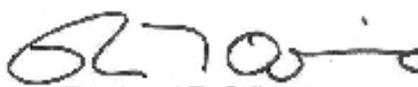
The magnitude of what this Nation and our Soldiers have accomplished in Iraq is unprecedented. We have never been more proud of our Army – our Soldiers, Civilians, and our Families. You freed over twenty-five million people from tyranny and given hope when hope was forsaken. Our Army provided new opportunity for the people of Iraq. No other Army in the world could have accomplished what you have done – Only American Soldiers.

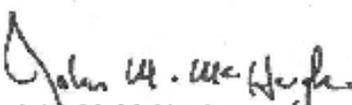
Throughout Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation New Dawn, our Soldiers embodied physical and mental toughness and courage under fire. Over the past eight years, the quality of our Soldiers has stood in stark contrast to the desert sands. Just as the WWII generation defeated tyranny across the globe, a new generation – galvanized by the attacks of September 11th – bravely defeated tyranny once again. Even during the darkest days in Iraq, our Soldiers never wavered in the face of growing doubt. They continued to risk life and limb for a cause larger than themselves. For their heroic action, they received nearly 9,000 awards for valor including two Medals of Honor, 16 Distinguished Services Crosses, and 408 Silver Stars.

We remember those who have made the ultimate sacrifice, our Wounded Warriors, our Gold Star Families, and all of our loved ones who have been touched by the horror of war. Their sacrifices have given meaning to our values and ideals. For that, we thank them. A grateful Nation will always remember, respect, and appreciate these heroes as the Next Greatest Generation.

We are extremely proud of all of our Soldiers, Civilians, and Families. Our Army has once again proved that it is America's Force of Decisive Action. Thank you for a job well done. Army Strong!


Raymond F. Chandler III
Sergeant Major of the Army


Raymond T. Odierno
General, United States Army
Chief of Staff


John M. McHugh
Secretary of the Army

Fort Stewart SOS Team Members

Cheryl Sowell, SOS Support Coordinator

Cheryl is a SOS Support Coordinator and is here to provide long-term support to Family Members of the Fallen. Ms. Sowell will facilitate support groups, provide life skills education, assist Survivors in managing lifelong benefit transition milestones and connect Survivors with counseling and other local resources.

Ms. Sowell has had the privilege of being a member of the Army Family for the past 35 years. She joined the military in 1976 and has spent the last 4 years working as a federal government employee.

Prior to joining the SOS program in January 2011, Ms. Sowell was the Family Advocacy Program Specialist/Sexual Assault Response Coordinator in Baumholder, Germany. Over the course of her career she has worked primarily in law enforcement as a Specialized Senior Parole Officer in Georgia and Oklahoma dealing specifically with sexual predators and their victims. Ms. Sowell has also worked as a Sexual Assault Investigator for the State of California Attorney General's Office. She graduated from Gardner-Webb University with a BA in Social Science, a Graduate Certificate in Forensic Criminology/Victimology from University of Massachusetts at Lowell and a Masters Degree in Criminal Justice from the University of Central Missouri.

Ms. Sowell is married to MSG Charles T. Sowell and has three daughters, Shanay, Kashya, and Keya, and seven grandchildren. Her awards include a State Board of Pardon and Paroles Letter of Commendation for Heroism 08/92, a Dekalb County Sheriff's Citizen Commendation 1993, a Certificate of Appreciation 1996 Olympics, a Certificate of Appreciation 1AD-2009 and the Molly Pitcher Award 1/84 FA. She hails from the Hinesville area and is fortunate to have family and friends throughout the community

Sherry Page, SOS Support Coordinator

Sherry is a SOS Support Coordinator and is here to provide long-term support to Family Members of the Fallen. She has been part of the Military Community for over twenty five years as a Military Spouse. She has served the Fort Stewart community since 2008. Prior to working as a SOS, Sherry was an EFMP Systems Navigator, and a Family Advocacy Program Specialist.

Her education includes a Bachelors Degree in Social Work from East Tennessee State University and a Masters Degree in Human Services from Murray State University. Sherry is a native of Virginia. Her husband, Randy, is stationed at Fort Stewart. They have two sons, Dustin and Matthew.

Meghan Page, SOS Financial Counselor

Meghan is the SOS Financial Counselor and is here to provide assistance to Surviving Families through investment and estate planning education. Prior to joining the SOS program in January 2011 she was a Financial Advisor for over four years at an investment firm located in Portland, Maine.

She graduated from the University of Southern Maine with a Bachelors Degree in Business Administration in 2002 and a Masters Degree in Finance in 2009. She holds two financial securities licenses through the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority. Prior to her career in finance she worked as a certified tennis professional at clubs in Maine and Florida, and as the Director of Skier Services at the Mt. Abram Ski Resort in Maine.

Though Meghan has spent most of her life in Maine and is new to the Fort Stewart area she is not new to the Army. Her husband, Geoff, has been in the Army for 19 years and has spent time both in the regular Army and in the National Guard. Meghan enjoys running, tennis and spending time with her two beagles, Tippy and Teddy.

Gold Star License Plate Information

Several states offer Gold Star License Plates which are a symbol of our pride and gratitude for the Fallen Soldiers and their Surviving Families. These plates are a constant reminder of the sacrifices that have been made to keep our country free.

Georgia Gold Star License Plate :



Georgia Gold Star Family license plates are available to the spouse, mother and father at no cost. Additional tags are available and incur an initial fee and annual renewal fees.

Required Documents: Copy of the DEERS Report dated prior to the death of the Fallen Service Member. If the DEERS report is not immediately available, please provide a copy of the Fallen Service member's obituary published within two years after the Service Member's death, listing the eligible Family Member's full name. The Gold Star license plate shall not be transferred except to a vehicle subsequently purchased by the eligible Family Member. Further information can be obtained by visiting the following website: <http://motor.etax.dor.ga.gov/motor/plates/platesamples.aspx>

Florida Gold Star License Plate :



Florida Gold Star Family license plate are available to honor the Families of those killed in service during peacetime, act of war, or conflict. The Surviving Spouse of Florida residents who

have been awarded the Gold Star, or the Surviving Parents or Guardians (if there is no spouse) and sibling, may apply for a Gold Star License Plate.

The individual requesting the tag must complete form HSMV 83034, provide required proof and submit to your local tax collector for processing. Fees are assessed according to the weight of the vehicle. Further information can be obtained by visiting the following website: <http://www.flhsmv.gov/specialtytags/miltags.html>

South Carolina Gold Star License Plate :



South Carolina Gold Star Family license plate is available to Family Members of military service personnel killed in action or while in service. To obtain the Gold Star Family

plate, customers must present military documentation of their Family Member's death.

The plate fee is \$30 every two years in addition to the regular motor vehicle registration fee. Further information can be obtained by visiting the following website: www.scdmvonline.com/VehPlateSpecialty.aspx

Survivor Outreach Services Vehicle Identification Decals

We are happy to announce that the Survivor Outreach Services Vehicle Identification Decal is now available to be issued to all eligible Survivors. The SOS Vehicle Identification Decal is provided to Survivors with the utmost gratitude for their sacrifice and that of their loved one. If you do not have a Department of Defense vehicle identification decal, use of this decal should make it much easier to gain entrance to Army installations by eliminating the requirement to obtain a visitor vehicle pass whenever you come to Fort Stewart. The SOS vehicle decal will serve as your local access credential in accordance with Department of Defense security standards. It is intended solely for recognition purposes and does not grant additional entitlements or privileges that you are not already authorized. In addition to having the decal on your vehicle, current Department of Defense Physical Access Control policy requires everyone seeking entrance to a military installation to stop at the gate and present a government issued photo identification such as a driver's license or Uniformed Services Identification and Privilege Card. This decal is for use on Army installations and might not be accepted at Navy, Marine, and Air Force Bases.



If you are interested in receiving this decal please call a member of the SOS team so that we can setup an appointment to meet with you to assist in the application process.

Global Assessment Tool (GAT) for Family Members

The GAT will assess your emotional, spiritual, social, and family fitness.

We encourage everyone to use The Global Assessment Tool (GAT) to enhance individual resiliency. The GAT was developed as a benchmarking component of the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness (CSF) program. With assistance from researchers from the University of Michigan, the GAT was designed to measure fitness emphasizing the following four areas: emotional, social, spiritual and Family.



The GAT has specifically designated assessment tools for Soldiers, Family Members and Army Civilians. Upon completion of the GAT, participants may complete training modules for each area that are specifically tailored to enhance individual resiliency. The modules are self paced individual virtual training. GAT training modules are well prepared and beneficial toward building resilience.

You will be assessed on your emotional, spiritual, social, and family fitness. The spiritual dimension questions on the GAT pertain to the domain of the Human Spirit: they are not "religious" in nature. The Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Program defines spiritual fitness as strengthening a set of beliefs, principles, or values that sustain a person beyond family, institutional, and societal sources of support. Also, spiritual fitness provides a person a sense of purpose, meaning, and the strength to persevere and prevail when faced with significant challenges and responsibilities. It promotes general well-being, enhances self-confidence, and increases personal effectiveness.

To take the GAT, please visit the following website and follow the directions below:

Website: <http://csf.army.mil/>

Directions:

- 1) Select the green tab that reads: "Family Members: Take the GAT Here"
- 2) On the next screen select the blue tab that reads: "Continue to the Family GAT"
- 3) On the next screen read the text and select the blue tab that reads: "Continue to the Family GAT" - the assessment questions will begin on this screen

5 Tips to Save Money when Grocery Shopping



- 1) Always shop with a list (this will cause you to only buy items you need).
- 2) Buy generics (most of the time generics taste the same as the name brand item and can save you hundreds of dollars every year).
- 3) Use coupons (it is worth it to pay \$1.50 for your local paper because you get many useful coupons. There are also several coupons available for free online).
- 4) Review the weekly sales flyer for your local grocery and stock up on items you use frequently.
- 5) Don't shop hungry (when you're hungry everything looks good and you will tend to buy more).

Financial Fitness

It's Tax Time!

This year, the deadline for filing your federal tax return is Tuesday April 17. Taxpayers receive an extra two days to file because April 15 falls on a Sunday and April 16 is Emancipation Day in Washington, D.C. Before you go out and pay someone to prepare your tax return you should look into the IRS Free File program. You may be able to prepare and file your federal tax return for free through the program, which is a partnership between the IRS and private tax software developers to encourage taxpayers to file tax returns electronically.

Most military ID card holders are eligible to have their taxes prepared for free on a military installation. The Fort Stewart and Hunter Army Airfield (HAAF) Tax Centers are open until April 17th. To make an appointment at Fort Stewart please call (912) 767-1040 and to make an appointment at HAAF please call (912) 315-3675. Additionally there are numerous Voluntary Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program centers within our area that provide free tax help to low-moderate income (generally \$50,000 and below) people who are unable to prepare their own tax returns. To find a VITA center near you call (800) 906-9887.

Individual financial counseling services are available to Survivors in all areas of money management. This includes general money management, goal setting, education planning, investment education, risk management, retirement, tax and estate planning. The Financial Counselor works closely with the Casualty Assistance Center's Benefits Coordinator, the Survivor legal team, and various community agencies to ensure financial issues are addressed.

Please call Meghan Page, SOS Financial Counselor at 912-435-9598 to discuss your financial questions.

Survivor Outreach Services Dial & Dine Financial Series for Survivors

Please register by
Friday March 30th!!



Wednesday April 4, 2012 7pm EST

Topic: Financial Strategies for Recent Survivors

Call in to talk with Meghan Page and other SOS Financial Counselors from around the country about tax and financial opportunities/issues of which Survivors, especially those that are within 1 year of receiving the death gratuity/SGLI, can potentially take advantage. This is a great way for you to learn about important financial issues and ask questions without having to drive all the way to Fort Stewart.

Call or email Meghan at (912) 435-9598, meghan.m.page@us.army.mil for more information and to register for the Dial & Dine conference call. You must be registered by Friday March 30, 2012 in order to participate in the call.

Survivor Outreach Services Circle of Friends Gathering The 2nd Friday of each month



This is a great chance for us to get together and talk about what is going on in your life. We meet on the 2nd Friday of every month, the location and time varies. Let us know if there is somewhere in the Richmond Hill/Savannah area that you think would be a good place to meet—we are open to suggestions.

All Surviving Family Members and Friends are invited!



Call or email the Fort Stewart SOS team for info about this month's meeting!
(912) 435-9761, (912) 435-9633, (912) 435-9598, stewartsos@conus.army.mil

Upcoming Events

February 2012	March 2012	April 2012	May 2012
5th Super Bowl Party at Club Stewart	9th Circle of Friends (location TBD)	Month of the Military Child	11th Circle of Friends (location TBD)
10th Circle of Friends 11:30am at Jalapeños in Richmond Hill	12th Community Showcase and Travel Show at HAAF	5th Gold Star Spouses Day	28th Memorial Day
20th Presidents Day	13th Community Showcase and Travel Show at Fort Stewart	13th Circle of Friends (location TBD)	30th Fort Stewart Facebook Town Hall on 3rd ID FB Page
29th Fort Stewart Facebook Town Hall on 3rd ID FB Page	17th St. Patrick's Day Celebration in Savannah	17th Taxes due	
	31st Easter Egg Hunts at Fort Stewart and HAAF		

SOS is committed to providing both social and educational opportunities for Survivors of Fallen Service Members. Please let us know if there are any additional events you would like us to coordinate.

Survivors are welcome to attend events held at Fort Stewart that are not part of the SOS program.

Please contact SOS for more information about any of the events listed above.



SOS Team Members

Fort Stewart/Hunter Army Airfield

Soldier & Family Assistance Center
1145 Niles Ave.

Fort Stewart, GA 31313

www.stewart.army.mil

stewartsos@conus.army.mil

Be sure to "like" us on Facebook!

Support Coordinators

Cheryl Sowell

(912) 435-9761

cheryl.sowell@us.army.mil

Sherry Page

(912) 435-9633

sherry.page1@us.army.mil

Financial Counselor

Meghan Page

(912) 435-9598

meghan.m.page@us.army.mil

Miami, Florida

9301 NW 33rd St

Doral, FL 33172-1202

Support Coordinator

Madhya Husta

(305) 437-2178

madhya.husta@hq.southcom.mil

Financial Counselor

Rudy Tabares

(305) 437-2178

rodolfo.h.tabares.ctr@us.army.mil

St. Augustine, Florida

State Family Programs Office

310 Charlotte Street

St. Augustine, FL 32084

SOS Support Coordinator

Carol Pryor

(904) 823-0157

carol.pryor@us.army.mil

Orlando, Florida

9500 Armed Forces Reserve Dr.

Orlando, FL 32827

Support Coordinator

Shinequa Baines

(404) 903-7748

shinekqua.baines@usar.army.mil

Financial Counselor

Gwen Hannah

(404) 903-7739

gwen.hannah@usar.army.mil

Tallahassee, Florida

McMillan National Guard Armory

1225 Easterwood Dr

Tallahassee, FL 32311

Support Coordinator

Matthew Reeves

(850) 459-6630

matthew.reeves3@us.army.mil